

The use of corporal punishment and its effects on students' academic performance in Swaziland

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ABSTRACT: This study sought to establish the effects of corporal punishment on students' academic performance in finishing classes in Swaziland. Purposive sampling was used to select head teachers, teachers, students and parents. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. Data collected were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings revealed that: improvement in academic performance, and students drop out of school and some become stubborn were effects of corporal punishment. Guidance and counselling, manual work and positive discipline were suggested as alternative strategies to corporal punishment. The researcher concludes that corporal punishment should not be banned completely but teachers should strike a balance between using corporal punishment and positive discipline. It was recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training should conduct awareness workshops and seminars on the effects of corporal punishment.

Index words: Corporal Punishment, Academic Performance, Finishing Classes, Students

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I. BACKGROUND AND SETTING OF THE STUDY

Globally, students are indiscriminately subjected to corporal punishment. Corporal punishment has been generally defined as the infliction of pain. In an educational setting, it is the teacher or other educational official upon the body of a student as a penalty for doing something which has been disapproved by the punisher (Marinescu, 2010). Corporal punishment is usually inflicted through canning, slapping, swatting and spanking. From the definition, it may be deduced that those who advocate the continued use of corporal punishment believe that it is useful and effective in making students conform to the expected standards of behaviour at school in particular and society in general. The use of corporal punishment has recently sparked criticism and heated debate locally, regionally and internationally from parents, educationists, psychologists and human rights activists.

Corporal punishment is used worldwide as a means of controlling undesirable behaviour. In some parts of the world it is used extensively freely, partly because teachers do not know any better method to discipline students due to the low level of education and partly because there are no measures in existence to restrain its use (Mwamwenda, 1995). Moreover, globally less than 20 states have prohibited all forms of corporal punishment by law at household level and institutions. Thus 97 % of children in the world are not protected from corporal punishment (Save the Children, 2008).

In Africa for years until the 20th century, teachers were beating students (Lambert, 2012). However, in the late 1960's and early 1970's the cane was phased out in most primary schools. In England in 1987 the cane was banned in state funded secondary schools. It was banned in private schools in 1999 (Lambert, 2012). In 1989, governments worldwide promised all children the same rights by adopting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The CRC explicitly requires every State to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence (Article 37 and Article 39). The CRC dictates that Member States must provide support to children who are victims of violence. The CRC requires school discipline to be consistent with the child's human dignity and conformity with the present convention. Article 28(2) dictates that "it is without using corporal punishment" (UNICEF, 2010).

UNICEF (2010), furthermore, the African Charter on the Right and Welfare of Child (ACRWC) also protects children from physical and mental abuse, thereby prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment and other forms of humiliating and degrading punishment of children. The ACRWC dictates that Members of States shall take specific legislative, administrative, social and education measures to protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect and/or maltreatment. Also, the protection of the children from violence is of paramount importance, thus the CRC and

the ACRWC are legal documents which highlight how children must be protected from the various forms of abuse without compromise. Corporal punishment of children violates children's rights to physical integrity and human dignity, as upheld by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Again, Save the Children Sweden fights for children's rights. It influences public opinion and supports children at risk in Sweden and in the world. It is advocating for non-violent forms of discipline based on respect for children's right. (UNICEF, 2010)

Swaziland is signatory to the Convention on the Right of the Child, which compels her to pass laws and take social, education and administrative measures to protect the child from all forms of physical and mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment and abuse (Tungata, 2006). Swaziland rectified the CRC in 1995. She has made a reservation to the CRC relating to the progressive implementation of children's right to education.

According to Shongwe (2013) a certain high school in the Northern part of Swaziland has been accused by Save the Children of using corporal punishment against its students. The report says corporal punishment is institutionalized in this particular school and teachers can administer as many strokes of the cane as they desire, much against the limit stipulated in the regulations in the School Guide and Procedures officially issued by the Ministry of Education and Training. Shongwe further stated that the hitting of students by teachers in Swaziland schools is not limited to strokes of the cane, but includes methods such as a slap with the open hand, kicks and fists. This is a clear indication that the excessive use of corporal punishment in the schools of Swaziland is rife.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is an escalating rate of students who suffer serious injuries in schools through the use of corporal punishment by teachers. Corporal punishment is meted out in a gigantic scale and in a non-compliant fashion contrary to the laid down rules and regulations by the Ministry of education and Training (School Guide and Procedures, 1977). Again in November 21, 2014 the Times of Swaziland had this headline 'Pupil whipped by two teachers bedridden' (Nene, 2014). In both spine chilling incidents, the teachers face prosecution or face being sued in a court of law for either wrongly or excessively punishing learners. While some school administrators and teachers support the use of corporal punishment, others are strongly opposed to it (Nakpodia, 2012). In June 27, 2013 the Times of Swaziland published an article entitled 'Teacher reported to police for giving pupil 19 strokes' (Ndelela, 2013). This article clearly demonstrates the prevalence of the use of corporal punishment.

All along corporal punishment in Swaziland was legal as per the dictates of the School guide and Procedures, 1977. In 2011, there was a paradigm shift whereby the Ministry of Education and Training issued a Sector Policy which is advocating for positive discipline (The Swaziland Education and Training Sector Policy, 2011). Nevertheless, corporal punishment is still rife in schools in Swaziland. It is not known if the continued excessive use of corporal punishment in Swazi schools does enhance students' academic performance. This study establishes the effects of corporal punishment on students' academic performance.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to establish the effects of corporal punishment on students' academic performance in Swaziland schools in the Lubombo region.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Explore the effects of administering corporal punishment on students' academic performance.
2. Establish the challenges that learners and teachers encounter as a result of corporal punishment.
3. Identify alternative strategies to corporal punishment that teachers consider to be the most important in enhancing students' academic performance.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was underpinned by the Utilitarian Theory of Punishment (Lewis, 1997). The Utilitarian Theory of Punishment is built around punishing offenders in order to discourage or "deter" future wrong doing. The utilitarian theory is "consequential" in nature. It recognizes that punishment has effects on results for both the perpetrator and the environment in which he or she lives. The theory contends that the total good produced by the punishment should exceed the total evil. In other words, punishment should be humane. It should not be excessive or too harsh.

The theory aims to deter future occurrences (Zeibert, 2006). Deterrence takes two different forms. There is general deterrence and specific deterrence. In general deterrence, rules are already put in place with the expected punishments (Reyna, 2001). The general deterrence captures classroom rules and school rules which

must be adhered to at all times for the smooth running of the school. Any deviation leads to chaos in the school. Hence teachers beat students.

In a classroom situation, the teacher draws classroom rules in conjunction with the students and penalties for violating the rules are well known by the students. If any student breaks any of the rules, the student gets penalized. Problematic students are known and are brought into order either by referring them to guidance and counselling teacher (s) or through parent involvement. The specific deterrence contains the notion 'prevention is better than cure'. The rules are meant to be deterrent measures since anyone committing the offence will do so fully aware of the repercussions. The general deterrence strategies in utilitarian theory focus on future behaviours, preventing individuals from engaging in deviance or indiscipline by affecting their rational decision making process (Reyna, 2001). General deterrence means that punishment should prevent other people from committing crimes and should serve as an example to others that breaking rules or laws attracts punishment. The specific deterrence in utilitarian punishment focuses on punishing known deviants in order to prevent them from ever again violating the rules (Weiner, Graham, & Reyna, 1997).

The utilitarian rationale for punishment operates in these premises on the need to rehabilitate offenders. The goal of rehabilitation is to prevent future crime by giving offenders the ability to succeed within the confines of the law (Adams, 1992). There is more understanding of the offender and the need to nurture the offender and bring him/her to understand and appreciate that it is not beneficial to engage in deviant behaviour (Reyna, 2002). The offender has to be given room to reform and be able to teach others how to live within the confines of expected rules and regulations and thereby contributing to the maintenance of discipline.

Relevance of the utilitarian theory of punishment

The utilitarian theory is relevant to the study because it captures the reasons why teachers use corporal punishment in schools. It postulated that teachers beat students in order to discourage or "deter" future wrong doing (Zeibert, 2006). For example in a classroom situation teachers find it hard to not punish those who fail tests and do not do homework. Thus they are publicly punished for failing tests and not doing assignments in order to discourage such a bad habit.

The utilitarian theory is relevant to the study because it is advocating for humane punishment which is neither excessive nor too harsh. This idea of the theory is in line with the Constitution of Swaziland (2005) and Swaziland Children's Protection and Welfare (2012). The Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland Article 29 (2) dictates that: "A child shall not be subjected to abuse or torture or other cruel inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment subject to lawful and moderate chastisement for the purpose of correction." The Constitution of the Kingdom of Swaziland is echoed by the Swaziland Children's Protection and Welfare Act (2012) article 14 (1) and (2) respectively. Article 14 (1) dictates that "A child has a right to be protected from any form torture or other cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment which dehumanizes or is injurious to the physical, psychological, emotional and mental well-being of the child". Similarly Article 14 (2) states that, "A child should be disciplined in accordance with his age.... this implies that corporal punishment must be neither excessive nor too harsh as it is the component of this theory".

The theory is also in line with other studies that revealed that students who are exposed to corporal punishment have difficulty with concentration, lowered school achievement intense dislike of authority, somatic complaints, and tendency for school avoidance and school dropout rate escalates. Moreover, they become more rebellious and are more likely to demonstrate vindictive behaviour seeking retribution against school officials and other in society (Mwamwenda, 1995).

Empirical studies

Mwamwenda (1995) asserted that corporal punishment has negative effects on students' academic performance. Hassan and Bali (2013) when assessing the effects of corporal punishment on primary school students' academic performance and discipline in Unguja, Zanzibar found that students in schools under the alternative means to discipline project, had higher scores for all four years than those students from schools not under the alternative means to discipline. Hassan and Bali concluded that the findings casted doubts if corporal punishment really had positive effects on academic performance of students in schools. Mwamwenda posited that corporal punishment is an ineffective method of discipline and has major deleterious effects on the physical and mental health of those inflicted. Students may develop hatred for school altogether (Mwamwenda, 1995). The continued use of corporal punishment impedes class participation, decreases the attendance and increases the dropout rate (Naz et al., 2011).

According to Maphosa and Mammen (2011) corporal punishment can lead to severe psychological effects in students and can even shape their views sexually. Maphosa and Mammen further postulated that this is so because in some cases, the pain due to spanking often get mixed with sexual pleasure leading to a state of confusion in a child's mind. Maphosa and Mammen also argued that violence can never provide fruitful results, but can only cause devastation. Miller (2010) noted that through the use of corporal punishment students are

hurt and there are many reports of abrasions, severe muscles injuries, hematomas, kids who have whiplash injury. Miller further pointed out that students have died because of mistreatment. Nakpodia (2007) postulated that there is no evidence that corporal punishment leads to improved control in the classroom.

According to Tungata (2006) positive alternatives to corporal punishment which teachers can use to enhance academic performance include parental involvement, manual work, and the application of school rules and enforcement of the code of conduct. Furthermore, Tungata postulated that parents are in favour of being involved in maintenance of discipline in schools. Tungata's parental involvement issue was echoed by A Guide for State and Local Leaders (1998) which states that the school must introduce programmes that will increase the participation and support of parents in the education of learners. Furthermore, the Guide for State and Local Leaders posits that it is impossible to achieve any improvement without parents' support.

Maphosa and Shumba (2010) when studying South African educators on their capabilities after the banning of corporal punishment in schools reported that banning corporal punishment deteriorates discipline in schools. Educators feel disempowered by the outlawing of corporal punishment. Educators feel helpless and disempowered, and this may lead to unsuccessful teaching and learning. Tungata (2006) postulated that positive alternatives to corporal punishment which teachers can use to enhance academic performance include manual work. Ndembu (2013) when investigating the alternative strategies to corporal punishment and secondary student discipline in the Mangumu Division – Kinangop District in Kenya found that the use of guidance and counsellors is one alternative to corporal punishment. Ndembu (2013) observed that using appropriate teaching approaches was contributing in the decrease of student misbehaviour thus reducing the use of corporal punishment.

Ahmad, Said and Khan (2013) conducted a study on effect of corporal punishment on students' motivation and classroom learning. The findings in the study revealed that students who are subjected to corporal punishment are less motivated towards learning than those who are encouraged and not corporally punished. Students who are punished and discouraged hesitate to actively participate in classroom activities. The findings revealed that this greatly decreases their motivation level for learning. Instead teachers may look for other positive alternatives such as student engagement, field work, case study method and project based activities through creating a supportive learning environment.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was used for the study where both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect and analyse data. Consent to conduct the research was sought from the Ministry of Education and Training. This study was conducted in the Lubombo region. The sample for this study (n=93) included the 10 heads of schools, 30 teachers, 20 parents and 33 students from sampled primary and high schools. Simple random sampling was used to select schools and purposive sampling was used to select the participants in the study. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaire was used to collect data from participants. The study used content validity to validate the instrument. The researcher arrived at content validity through the results and comments from research experts. To establish reliability a pilot study was conducted among teachers and pupils in two public schools. Items that failed to measure the variables they were intended to measure were modified and others discarded completely. The schools that were used in the pilot study were excluded from the main study. The qualitative data was thematically analysed and presented in a narrative form and quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and presented using frequencies and percentages.

V. FINDINGS

The findings of the study were presented under the themes, administering corporal punishment and alternative strategies to corporal punishment.

Administering corporal punishment

The study wanted to investigate the effects of corporal punishment on students' academic performance. The results revealed that corporal punishment was a reality in the schools and that corporal punishment was necessary as an effective method of class control. A majority 8 (80%) of the head teachers were of the opinion that corporal punishment impedes on students' class participation, whilst on the other hand 6 (60%) disagreed that corporal punishment creates reluctance among students. Furthermore most 7 (70%) of the head teachers agreed that corporal punishment creates inferiority complex among students whilst on the other hand 7 (70%) of head teachers strongly disagreed that corporal punishment results in bad behaviour such as delinquency and anti-social behaviour. The participants were further asked to comment on the effects of corporal punishment in their own words. The following themes emerged from the data collected from head teachers: improves academic performance 6 (60%), enhances students to achieve their goals 2 (20%), improves behaviour 1 (10%) and can also result in students' drop out 1 (10%). Most of the head teachers indicated that corporal punishment

must be done away with to help students to do things the right way and be able to achieve their goals and become better future citizens.

Most 17 (52%) of the students agreed that corporal punishment made them hate teachers and 20 (61%) indicated that corporal punishment left a scar on their bodies whilst 17 (52%) stated that corporal punishment is an effective method for class control. On the other hand 17 (52%) of the students indicated that corporal punishment brings stress on them and most 23(70%) indicated that corporal punishment causes some students to stop school. It is also surprising that most 17(52%) of the participants agreed that corporal punishment helped them perform better. Most 22(67%) of the students strongly disagreed that corporal punishment made them miss school to rest at home and 20 (62%) disagreed that corporal punishment made them seek medical attention and 17 (52%) also disagreed that corporal punishment made them dislike school. The participants were also asked to comment on the effects of corporal punishment and the following themes emerged from data collected from students: 22 (67%) indicated that talking is better than corporal punishment whilst 20 (62%) stated that corporal punishment helps shape behaviour. Furthermore, 23 (70%) indicated that corporal punishment promotes good performance and 17 (52%) stated that it is abuse of power and it creates fear and hatred and positive discipline is much better. The students indicated that corporal punishment is necessary if it is applied without anger. The students indicated that some teachers met out corporal punishment yet they are dealing with their own issues.

The study sought to establish from both teachers and parents on the effects of administering corporal punishment. Themes that emerged from the interviews were: increases drop outs, improves academic work and changes negative behaviour. In terms of drop outs the participants indicated that *“Corporal Punishment is good for children, however sometimes it has negative impacts as I have seen in my community there are some children who decided to run away from school because of corporal punishment.”* Teachers also concurred with parents that some students absent themselves from school because of fear of corporal punishment. Teachers indicated that corporal punishment improves academic performance and also helps students to change their negative behaviours as they learn that one is punished for bad behaviour. One teacher had this to say: *“Students are smart once you become lenient they take advantage and they do not get to be serious with their school work, but once you are known as a teacher that you use corporal punishment they shape up and do their work without any problem.”* On the other hand parents also concurred with the teachers and stated that students tend to be serious with their school work if corporal punishment is used and it helps the students to perform better in their academic work.

The parents 18(90%) and teachers 17(57%) who participated in the interview also indicated that the effect of corporal punishment is that it changes negative behaviour. Teachers indicated that they deal with different personalities among students as one teacher had this to say: *“Some students come from violent families while others are just spoiled and do not want to take instructions. However, the use of corporal punishment shapes their behaviour and they gradually change because children need direction in life.”* The parents also indicated that corporal punishment changes a child's behaviour. One parent to support the above statement had this to say: *“Children need to be brought up the proper way, teachers are right in meting out corporal punishment on students because if teachers are lax then our children will become a problem in society, they will do as they like because no one would punish them for their wrong doing.”* This shows that corporal punishment has an effect on students in shaping their behaviour and in helping them to improve their performance academically.

Alternative strategies to corporal punishment.

A majority 9(90%) of the head teachers strongly agreed and agreed that guidance and counselling can be used to help students do the right thing. Furthermore, 9 (90%) of the head teachers agreed and strongly agreed that involving parents and guardians in discipline can be used to help students do the right thing. On the other hand, the participants also agreed and strongly agreed that mentoring can be used to help students do the right thing 7(70%). The head teachers disagreed 2(20%) and strongly disagreed 5(50%) that suspending offending students can be used to help students do the right thing while 6(60%) of the participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that ignoring misbehaviour when it does not affect other students can be used to help students do the right thing.

A Majority 28(85%) of the students indicated that teachers should receive more training on alternative means of punishment and 27(82%) of the participants were of the opinion that the guidance and counsellors teachers must be more involved in reforming students whilst 27(82%) indicated that parental meetings would help forge out a proper way of punishment to students. Most of the participants 25(76%) indicated that talking to students is another strategy that could be used instead of corporal punishment. A majority 27(82%) of the participants indicated staying outside of the classroom during lessons is not a proper strategy that is used as a form of punishment.

The researcher further sought to establish from teachers and parents the alternative strategies to corporal punishment. There were quite a number of suggestions that came from the participants however, the outstanding and most common ones were: positive discipline, guidance and counselling and manual work. In terms of positive discipline one teacher had this to say: *"I sometimes ignore the wrongs that students do and concentrate on the good things they do and I try by all means to talk about the good things that they do in class. This makes them to do good more than bad. It sometimes works for me but not always."* A teacher had this to say in support of using guidance and counselling as an alternative strategy to corporal punishment: *"As a school we do have a guidance and counselling teacher, so sometimes when we realise the matter that the child is experiencing is far deeper than what the eyes can see, we usually refer such student to the guidance teacher who has the ability to help the child."* Teachers and administrators impose corporal punishment on students for a variety of reasons. They beat students who perform poorly on exams, who talk in class, or who misbehave in countless other ways.

Many teachers, administrators, and parents believe that these violent punishments are necessary to teach children a lesson and to discourage them from similar practices in the future. Other teachers say that they prefer not to use physical means of disciplining students; however, they say that they must resort to these methods because they may be responsible for seventy-five or more students per class, and that they have no other way to maintain control of such a large group of young persons.

VI. DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that corporal punishment impedes on students' class participation Reyna (2001) also agrees with the findings of the study who postulated that students who receive corporal punishment show symptoms of dejection in studies, poor performance in the tests and also do not participate in the teaching and learning process enthusiastically. Furthermore the findings revealed that corporal punishment creates inferiority complex among students Mwamwenda (1995) agrees with the findings of the study. He argued that research revealed that students who are exposed to corporal punishment have lowered school achievement, a tendency for school avoidance and school dropout rate escalates and intense dislike of authority is perpetrated.

The participants in the study revealed that some students absent themselves from school because of fear of corporal punishment and end up dropping out of school. The findings are in line with Fontes (2005) and Greydanus et al (2013) who they concluded that harsh corporal punishment exposes students to escalating dropout rates. Morrel (2000) also found that the use of corporal punishment influences attendance of school children. Students remain absent from school and this situation of longer absenteeism leads to withdrawal from schools. On the other hand the findings revealed that students were of the opinion that corporal punishment brings stress on them and most of them indicated that corporal punishment causes some students to stop school. The students' opinions are also in line with Zindi (1997)'s findings that corporal punishment causes physical pain and gives children feeling of fear and insecurity which may affect their emotional development.

The findings revealed that positive discipline, guidance and counselling as well as manual work were alternative strategies the participants opted to corporal punishment. The findings are in agreement with Tungata (2006) who stated that positive alternatives to corporal punishment which teachers can use to enhance academic performance include parental involvement, manual work, the application of school rules and enforcement of the code of conduct. Ndembu (2013) when investigating the alternative strategies to corporal punishment and secondary student discipline in the Mangumu Division – Kinangop District in Kenya found that the use of guidance and counsellors on alternative corporal punishment. It was also observed that guidance and counselling and manual work were used as an alternative strategy. The findings are in line with Miller (2010), who postulated that advocates of corporal punishment over the years stated that corporal punishment is an effective form of changing child's misbehaviour.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, the researcher concluded that administering corporal punishment has an effect on students' academic performance and helps as an effective method of class control. However, on the other hand, corporal punishment can impede on students' class participation as it allows some students to drop out of school. Thus corporal punishment is used on students to correct wrong behaviours; improve their attention in class; helps students dedicate themselves to school work; enforce effective learning and manage students' behaviour. However administering corporal punishment has both negative and positive effects. Corporal punishment can instil fear on the students such that they cannot focus in class. These students develop negative attitude toward school and the teachers. Thus corporal punishment can perpetuate absenteeism and most students may end up dropping out of school. Secondly, the researcher concluded that guidance and counselling, talking to students, positive discipline, manual work and parental involvement in the punishment of students were alternative strategies that could be employed other than corporal punishment. Forms of positive discipline include the following: modelling by teachers, teacher class attendance and preparedness, use of child centred teaching

approaches, detention, parental involvement, understanding the types of learners, ignoring offenders and reinforcing positive behaviour and counselling frequently offending students, ban students from interesting activities, give them manual work such as sweeping the classrooms, cleaning school yard, digging pits and cutting grass. However, it was noted that corporal punishment has been found to be the quickest method of bringing an offender to order. It is convenient to the teacher and less time consuming. It brings order in class and in the school. Furthermore, to some students it improves class attendance and participation. It can further be concluded that corporal punishment should not be banned completely but teachers should strike a balance between using corporal punishment and positive discipline. Furthermore, corporal punishment should be meted with love.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

The Ministry of Education and Training should conduct awareness workshops and seminars about the effects of corporal punishment on students. There is need for government to deliberately organize seminars, conferences, workshops and other symposium where experts can be invited to train teachers on the modern issues and changes in education as far as discipline is concerned. Teachers' trainers and institutions of higher learning should ensure that while undergoing training, the student teachers are adequately equipped with alternative methods of discipline, now that corporal punishment is slowly being outlawed. Student teachers should be taught the importance of such methods in disciplining students. Such methods are counselling, reinforcement and rewards as well as positive discipline.

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